Evidently the permanent government in the U.S. now sees dioxin in the food supply as a threat to itself because it has begun a campaign of reassuring falsehoods, this time in the WALL STREET JOURNAL. We use the term "permanent government" as it was described by Lewis Lapham, editor of HARPER'S MAGAZINE:

"The permanent government, a secular oligarchy... comprises the Fortune 500 companies and their attendant lobbyists, the big media and entertainment syndicates, the civil and military services, the larger research universities and law firms. It is this government that hires the country's politicians and sets the terms and conditions under which the country's citizens can exercise their right --God-given but increasingly expensive --to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Obedient to the rules of men, not laws, the permanent government oversees the production of wealth, builds cities, manufactures goods, raises capital, fixes prices, shapes the landscape, and reserves the right to assume debt, poison rivers, cheat the customers, receive the gifts of federal subsidy, and speak to the American people in the language of low motive and base emotion."[1]

Lapham distinguishes the "permanent government," which is not elected, from the "provisional government," which is:

"The provisional government is the spiritual democracy that comes and goes on the trend of a political season and oversees the production of pageants.... Posting a rule of laws instead of men, the provisional government must live within the cage of high-minded principle, addressing its remarks to the imaginary figure known as the informed citizen or the thinking man, a superior being who detests superficial reasoning and quack remedies, never looks at PLAYBOY, remembers the lessons of history, trusts Bill Moyers, worries about political repression in Liberia, reads (and knows himself improved by) the op-ed page of the WALL STREET JOURNAL," Lapham writes.

* * *

Starting in March, Belgian health authorities discovered dioxin and PCBs in poultry, eggs, beef, pork, milk, butter and even in mayonnaise. Dioxin and PCBs are members of a family of 219 toxic chemicals that can damage the immune system and the hormones of humans and other animals. They can also cause cancer, according to the World Health Organization. [See REHW #636, #653.] The toxicity of dioxins and PCBs are reported in "toxic equivalents" -- a toxicity reporting system that takes into account the particular mixture of dioxins and PCBs that is being measured.

In late April, the Dutch Ministry of Health notified the Belgians that they had measured dioxin in two chickens at 958 and 775 parts per trillion toxic equivalents. In Belgium, the allowable limit for dioxin in chicken is 5 ppt toxic equivalents, and in the U.S. the limit is one ppt.[2]

Still Belgian authorities said nothing publicly. Then in early June word got out that Belgian foodstuffs were widely contaminated and the European Union and the U.S. clapped a quarantine on foods from Belgium. Other countries around the world immediately followed suit: May- lasia, Myanmar, Uruguay, Thailand, Australia, Brazil, Rus- sia, and China, among others. Suddenly tons of food were pulled from shops throughout Belgium and incinerated, leaving shelves bare. Within two weeks, the incident had cost Belgian farmers, grocers and food exporters an estimated $500 million -- a lot of money in a small country.

The problem was traced to 8 liters of oil containing PCBs contaminated with 50 to 80 milligrams of dioxin. The British NEW SCIENTIST says "one theory is" that the toxic oil was taken from an electrical transformer and dumped illegally into a public recycling container for used frying oil.[3] The contaminated oil ended up in an 88-ton (80 metric tone) batch of fat produced by Verkest, a company located near Ghent, Belgium. The fat was sold to 12 manufacturers of animal feed, who then produced 1760 tons (1600 metric tonnes) of contaminated animal feed. Starting in January, 1999, the feed was sold mainly in Belgium but also in France and the Netherlands.

According to CHEMICAL & ENGINEERING NEWS, at a public hearing June 9, a Dutch official said the problem had been solved in his country -- all of the contaminated foods had been eaten. No one is sure how many people were affected because no one is yet sure how widely the contaminated feed was distributed. "Either a few people got a large dose, or many people got a small dose," said Wim Traag from the Dutch State Institute for Quality Control of Agricultural Products.

The NEW SCIENTIST quoted Martin van der Berg from the University of Utrecht who calculated that adults who ate chicken and eggs contaminated at 900 ppt would take in 100 times the amount considered "safe" by the World Health Organization.

A 3-year-old child eating a single egg contaminated at 900 ppt toxic equivalents would increase his or her total body burden of dioxin equivalents by 20%, van der Berge calculated. He said this would probably not be enough to cause cancer in humans "but could affect neural and cognitive development, the immune system, and thyroid and steroid hormones, especially in unborn and young children," the NEW SCIENTIST reported.

Two weeks into the crisis, on June 13, the Belgian government suffered a massive defeat in elections. The next day the WALL STREET JOURNAL announced the debacle this way: "The center-left coalition of Prime Minister Jean-Luc Dehaene suffered a devastating defeat in national elections Sunday, punished for its handling of a food contamination scandal...." Mr. Dehaene promptly resigned.

Clearly, the political hazards of a dioxin-contaminated food supply were not lost on the permanent government in the U.S. Less than a week after the initial revelations about dioxin in Belgian foods, the WALL STREET JOURNAL began a campaign of disinformation.

On June 7, the JOURNAL had one of its staff reporters, Stephen D. Moore, try to reassure its readers under the headline, "Dioxins' Risk to Humans is Difficult to Appraise."[4]

The opening paragraph of the story did not mention that dioxins are toxic; it said dioxins are created by many industrial processes but also "in compost heaps." How could anyone develop a healthy respect for a chemical that originates in a pile of lawn clippings? No one fears the familiar. Very effective propaganda.

In the second paragraph, the JOURNAL introduced the idea that dioxins are toxic: "While there are dozens of different dioxins and furans, a closely related family of molecules, only about a half-dozen are toxic." Not true, but effective propaganda nevertheless.

Then the real point of Mr. Moore's work unfolds: a re-telling of the story of the 1976 accident at a Hoffman-LaRoche pesticide factory in Seveso, Italy, which spewed dioxin into the surrounding community. "At Seveso, a cloud of chemicals containing dioxin was released into the air and eventually contaminated an area of 15 square kilometers with a population of 37,000 people," the JOURNAL said.

And what happened to these 37,000 people? The JOURNAL now quotes Roche, the company that caused the accident: 447 citizens of Seveso "developed skin injuries that healed within a few weeks." And, "Another 193 people, mainly children, developed cases of chloracne, a condition characterized by dark skin blotches, that take months or even years to disappear." And that's the extent of it. In
the next sentence, the JOURNAL assures us that dioxin caused no permanent injuries at Seveso: "The Italian government has conducted studies of longer-term effects from the Seveso accident. At least so far, there's no evidence of any significant increase of miscarriages or cancer among local residents." Very reassuring, but completely untrue.

Actually, the Italian government's chief researcher, Pier Alberto Bertazzi, has published a series of studies in peer-reviewed journals, beginning in 1993, showing that many people exposed to dioxins at Seveso have suffered a variety of serious long-term effects including increased incidence of diabetes, heart disease, and cancer, including cancers of the stomach and rectum, leukemias (cancer of the blood-forming cells), Hodgkin's disease, and soft tissue sarcomas.[5]-8

Now the JOURNAL returns to the theme that dioxins are natural: "Dioxins also can come from natural sources. One contamination case in the U.S. a few years ago resulted from the use of clay as a binder in chicken feed. American regulators eventually traced the contaminated clay to a quarry in the state of Arkansas and established that the source of the dioxins was prehistoric." [See REHW #555.] In actual fact, American regulators did no such thing -- they never did figure out where that dioxin came from -- but this is unvarnished propaganda, and effective as such. Evidently not satisfied with this series of misrepresentations, the WALL STREET JOURNAL on June 21 turned over its editorial page to Elizabeth Whelan, president of the American Council on Science and Health, a scheme-tank supported by the chemical industry. Ms. Whelan is, frankly, one of the crudest and most shameless dissemblers of our time. She launched her career as lapdog of the permanent government by falsifying the history of Alar, the cancer-causing farm chemical that used to be found in apple juice intended for babies in the U.S., before the apple industry came to its senses and swore off the poison in 1989. [See REHW #530-535.]

In the WALL STREET JOURNAL June 21, Ms. Whelan assured her readers that "there was no evidence" of "health-threatening toxic materials" in Belgian food. Oh? This is because, she says, "no one has ever died or become chronically ill due to environmental exposure [to dioxin]." Oh? The problem in Belgium is Belgium's "unnecessarily stringent laws," Ms. Whelan asserts.

The dioxin problem in Belgium was imaginary, Ms. Whelan assures us. It "can be explained as an example of hysterical contagion," Ms. Whelan asserts. She then waxes academic, quoting a college professor who says mass hysterias have been recorded throughout European history. On this basis, Ms. Whelan concludes that the fear of dioxin in Belgium is just like the Alar episode in the U.S. in 1989 -- a make-believe problem.

It is interesting to us that the permanent government has to rely on such crude misrepresentations to reassure its loyal followers in the business community (those who read the op-ed page of the WALL STREET JOURNAL and know themselves improved by it). To us it means that the anti-dioxin campaign being conducted by grass-roots activists in the U.S. [see REHW #479] is having a good effect. No doubt the permanent government has reason to be nervous: they have contaminated the U.S. food supply with dangerous levels of dioxins and, as the Bible says, the truth will set people free. [See REHW #414, #463, #636.]

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